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AUTHOR Winter, Paul A.; Rinehart, James S.; Munoz, Marco A.
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ABSTRACT

America's public schools are facing a growing problem as the applicant pools for principal vacancies diminish. The purpose of this study was to assess principal certified personnel in a large school district to determine if they were interested in working in other capacities including their current jobs. A total of 251 persons were sent a mailed survey, and 194 (77.3 percent) responded. Participants received two questionnaires: one inquiring into background, current and expected job satisfaction, reasons for earning principal certification, among other topics, and the second involving job evaluation. Responses were analyzed statistically. Results suggest that a large proportion of the sample were approaching retirement and not actively pursuing the job of principal. An important reason for earning principal certification included expanding career options and assuming a greater leadership role in the district. The most significant barrier to pursuing a job as principal was satisfaction with the current job. Practical implications from this study include investing more resources in external recruitment, increasing efforts to recruit principals internally, investing more financial and human resources in recruiting principals from outside the district, and restructuring the job of principal to make it more attractive. (Contains 31 references and 5 tables of statistics.) (RT)

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Principal Certified Personnel: Do They Want the Job?

Paul A. Winter

University of Louisville

James S. Rinehart

University of Kentucky

Marco A. Muñoz

Jefferson County Public Schools

Correspondence to: Paul A. Winter

University of Louisville

College of Education and Human Development

Education Building, Room #335

Louisville, KY 40292

Phone: (502) 852-0617

Fax: (502) 852-4563

E-mail: winter@louisville.edu

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Principal Certified Personnel: Do They Want the Job?

The effort to recruit qualified principals to lead America's public schools is increasingly problematic due to a nationwide shrinkage in the applicant pools for principal vacancies (American Council of Secondary Administrators, 1998; National Association of Elementary and Secondary School Principals, 1998). Researchers have identified possible reasons for this phenomenon, including the pending retirements of "baby boomers" and individuals leaving administrative positions for other types of employment in education or the more lucrative private sector (Yerkes & Guaglianone, 1998). Other researchers point to the changed role of the principal, which is characterized by higher expectations related to student outcomes, a 60-80 hour work week, supervision of evening activities, mandated state and district paperwork, and the difficulty of getting teachers to change their instructional methods (Murphy & Beck, 1994). The latter point is especially important in areas undergoing school reform, as was the case with the school district that served as the site for this investigation.

Purpose

The general purpose of this study was to assess the principal certified personnel in the 26th largest school district

in the United States to determine if this internal pool of potential applicants for principal vacancies was useful to the district for the purposes of principal recruitment. Stated another way, were these principal certified personnel really interested in pursuing a job as principal, or were they more interested in working in other capacities including their current jobs? The district is located in a state undergoing systemic school reform. In the focal state, local school councils select principals from a slate of candidates provided by the district superintendent. There is great pressure on principals to improve student achievement. Schools are classified according to scores on standardized tests and unsuccessful schools can be declared "in crisis", resulting in the schools having to implement improvement plans or be subjected to instructional interventions by the state department of education (Van Meter, 1991).

The district is located in a large metropolitan area in the Midwest and has 150 schools serving approximately 93,000 students. This study had six research objectives: (a) construct a profile of the principal certified personnel's demographic and personal characteristics; (b) use job attraction theory as a framework to assess the participants' attraction to the job of principal; (c) compare the participants' satisfaction with specified job facets of their current jobs with their expected

satisfaction with those same job facets if they were to assume a position as principal; (d) identify reasons why the participants earned principal certification; (e) evaluate the participants' assessment of the changes in the job of principal that might make the job more attractive; and (f) have the district's principal certified personnel rate possible barriers to assuming a job as principal.

The rationale for conducting this investigation was that, in an era of shrinking applicant pools for principal vacancies, it is important for school district officials to assess the viability of their principal certified personnel relative to filling principal vacancies. This study provides a methodological approach and instrumentation to accomplish this task. What is at stake is that, as district's pool of principal certified personnel becomes less viable for recruiting principals, the district will have to invest greater human and financial resources in recruiting principals from outside the district.

Theoretical Framework and Research Advancements

Recruitment theory (Breaugh, 1992; Rynes & Barber, 1990; Schwab, Rynes, & Aldag, 1987) and job satisfaction theory (Cranny, Smith, & Stone, 1992; Hulin, Roznowski, & Hachiya, 1985; Locke, 1976) framed this study. With respect to recruitment, existing theories postulate that characteristics of

the position vacancy and personal characteristics of the potential applicant are among the most salient variables that impact applicant attraction to the job. Accordingly, this study addressed vacancy and applicant characteristics associated with applicant job attraction. The research protocols included a recruitment simulation that allowed the study participants to rate a principal job, thus, providing an indication of their willingness to accept an interview for the job and accept the job if offered.

This study was the first to have a sample of a school district's internal pool of principal certified personnel react to a principal job operationalized by an actual recruitment medium (i.e., the formal job description). Also, this study responds to the call by Pounder and Young (1996) for more K-12 studies about administrator recruitment. The vast majority of existing studies address teacher recruitment (e.g., Young, Rinehart, & Heneman, 1993; Young, Rinehart, & Place, 1989). The operational definition of recruitment used in this research was the one developed by Breaugh (1992): "Employee recruitment involves those organizational activities that (1) influence the number and/or the types of applicants who apply for a position and/or (2) affect whether a job offer is accepted" (p. 4).

With respect to job satisfaction, previous research indicates that the level of an individual's job satisfaction

impacts many personnel outcomes including work productivity and employee turnover (Hulin, Roznowski, & Hachiya, 1985). In the particular context of recruiting educators, one study about community college faculty recruitment (Winter & Kjorlien, 2000) provided preliminary evidence that potential job applicants' satisfaction with their current jobs is an indication of whether or not they are willing to pursue another job. In the present study, we compared principal certified educators' satisfaction with their current jobs with their expected job satisfaction should they assume a principal position. This comparison was a way to gauge the study participants' likely attraction to the principalship. The operational definition of job satisfaction used in this research was developed by Locke (1976): "Job satisfaction may be defined [. . .] as a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences" (p. 1300).

Methods

Participants

The population for this study was 251 principal certified personnel employed by the focal school district. The sample consisted of 194 individuals who responded to a mailed survey. The response rate goal for the research was 60%. The actual response rate (77.3%) exceeded the standard recommended for social science research: "a response rate of 60 percent is

considered good, and a response rate of 70 percent or more is very good" (Babbie, 1990, p. 182).

Instrumentation

The participants received two instruments. The first instrument was a questionnaire composed of five sections: (a) background information about the participants, (b) current and expected job satisfaction scales, (c) reasons for earning principal certification, (d) changes in the job of principal that might make the job more attractive, and (e) barriers to pursuing the job of principal. The participants responded to the current and expected job satisfaction items using 5-point Likert-type scales (1 = Not at All Satisfied, 5 = Extremely Satisfied). The scales for reasons for earning principal certification assessed degree of importance: (1 = Not at All Important, 5= Extremely Important). The items for changes in the job of principal assessed the likelihood the change would make the job more attractive (1 = Not at All Likely, 5 = Very Likely). The participants evaluated barriers to pursuing the job of principal in terms of their agreement or disagreement a factor was a barrier (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). In all cases, the rating items reflected scale points and anchors used in survey research similar to the present study (Aiken, 1996; Dillman, 2000; Fowler, 1988; Gable & Wolf, 1993).

The second instrument was a job evaluation instrument with two parts: (a) a principal job description identical to the one used in the district serving as the research site and (b) two rating items adopted from previous job attraction studies performed in the K-12 sector (Winter & Dunaway, 1997; Young, Rinehart, & Heneman, 1993). The rating items were summed to provide a two-item composite score for participant attraction to the job of principal. The two items were: (a) "If offered, how likely would you be to accept an interview for the principal job described?" and (b) "If offered, how likely would you be to accept the principal job described?". Coefficient alpha for the composite score was .99, which far exceeded the minimum coefficient of internal consistency(.60) recommended by Nunnally (1967) for use of composite scores in statistical analysis. By completing the job evaluation items, the participants role-played as job applicants in a manner similar to teacher recruitment simulations conducted by such researchers as Rynes and Lawler (1983), Winter (1996), and Young and Heneman (1986).

The above two-item composite rating of the job was the dependent variable for three procedures: independent samples *t*-tests, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), and ordinary least squares (OLS) stepwise multiple regression. The independent samples *t*-tests were for group mean score comparisons based on gender (male, female) and ethnicity (White, minority). The

independent variable for the ANOVA was current job held (assistant principal, school counselor, teacher, other). The ANOVA procedure served to analyze the data for the experimental (i.e., recruitment simulation) phase of the study. The predictor variables examined in the regression were participant demographic and personal characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, number of dependent children, year of principal certification, number of times interviewed for a principal job, number of times offered a job as principal, and self-rating of capability to do the job of principal (1 = Not at All Capable, 5 = Extremely Capable). The capability rating also served as a dependent variable for two additional independent samples t-tests, with gender and ethnicity cast as independent variables. The procedure used to assess differences between group mean scores for current and expected job satisfaction was the paired samples t-test. The remaining questionnaire items were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, measures of central tendency (i.e., mean, median, mode), and measures of dispersion (e.g., standard deviation, range).

Results

The descriptive statistical analysis rendered a profile of the study participants. The mean age of the participants was 50 (median = 51, mode = 50) and, on average, the participants had

held their principal certification since 1988. Seventy-one percent of the participants had held their certification for over five years. These data suggest a large proportion of the sample were approaching retirement and were not actively pursuing the job of principal. Seventy-nine percent of the participants were White and 21% were minority (predominately African American). Sixty-one percent were male and 39% were female. In terms of the current job held, the distribution was: assistant principal (40.0%), school counselor (6.5%), teacher (28.2%), and other (25.3%). Individuals in the "other" category held a wide array of administrative positions (e.g., Director of Instruction). A summary of the descriptive data appears in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Results of the independent samples *t*-tests indicated there was no significant difference between men and women with respect to either their attraction to the job of principal or their self-reported capability to do the job (see Tables 2 and 3).

Insert Table 2 about here

Insert Table 3 about here

An identical analysis (see Tables 2 and 3) determined that ethnicity was not a significant influence on either job attraction or self-reported capability to do the job.

A one-way ANOVA (see Table 4), with current job held

Insert Table 4 about here

(assistant principal, school counselor, teacher, other) serving as the independent variable and principal job rating serving as the dependent variable, detected significant differences in group mean scores. The post hoc test used was the Tukey (HSD) test. Assistant principals ($\underline{M}$ = 8.1) and school counselors ($\underline{M}$ = 7.9) rated the job significantly higher than did teachers ($\underline{M}$ = 6.8) and individuals holding other administrative jobs ($\underline{M}$ = 6.4). The range for the composite rating was 2-10. Teachers and the "other group" were near the midpoint on this scale, suggesting their attraction to the job of principal was moderate at best.

Job ratings were regressed on the demographic and personal characteristics of the participants (see Table 5). Two

Insert Table 5 about here

significant predictors emerged. Age accounted for 4.3% of the variance in participant rating of the job and self-reported capability to do the job accounted for 30.9% of the variance in rating of the job. As age increased, job ratings decreased. As self-reported capability to do the job increased, job ratings also increased. Cohen (1988) described a large effect size for regression as $R^2 = .26$. The effect size for the total model detected in this study ($R^2 = .352$) exceeded Cohen's criterion for a large effect size.

Paired samples *t*-tests for the satisfaction items detected eight instances where the participants expected their satisfaction with a job facet to be higher in the job of principal than in their current job: opportunity to use talents ($t = -3.3$, $p < .001$), salary ($t = -10.2$, $p < .0001$), income from extra-service pay ($t = -2.4$, $p < .01$), opportunity for career advancement ($t = -6.7$, $p < .0001$), opportunity to experience varied activities ($t = -3.3$, $p < .001$), opportunity to influence implementation of school policies ($t = -5.9$, $p < .0001$), opportunity to give direction to others ($t = -6.1$, $p < .0001$), and receiving recognition for doing a good job ($t = -3.8$, $p < .001$). Instances where satisfaction in the current job was

higher than expected job satisfaction in the job of principal included: vacation time (t = 2.1, p < .03), time with family (t = 6.5, p < .0001), job security (t = 4.4, p < .0001), hours worked per week (t = 3.5, p < .001), hours worked per year (t = 2.5, p < .01), and effect of the job on the spouse's career (t = 2.3, p < .02).

The highest rated reasons for earning principal certification were to expand career options and to assume a greater leadership role in the district. The highest rated recommended change in the job of principal was assignment of some principal job duties to other personnel. The highest rated barrier to pursuing a job as principal was satisfaction with the current job.

Discussion

The task of recruiting qualified principals is increasingly difficult due to shrinking applicant pools. This is a national phenomenon (McAdams, 1998). Yet, despite the growing shortage of qualified applicants, few empirical studies exist about school districts' internal pools of principal certified personnel. Performing such internal analyses would seem to be urgent if school districts are to be staffed adequately with administrative personnel. It appears that as few as 10% of the 194 certified personnel who participated in this research are likely to apply for principal vacancies. Almost three-fourths of

the study participants were eliminated as potential applicants for principal vacancies by such factors as age, pending retirement, and lack of attraction to the job. Other individuals had developed alternative careers and were satisfied in their current jobs. Factors that made the job unattractive included: long hours, less vacation time, less job security, and time away from family.

Some of the practical implications of this study include: (a) investing more resources in external recruitment; (b) increasing efforts to recruit principals internally through such methods as more aggressive mentoring of potential principals by individuals already holding the job; (c) investing more financial and human resources in recruiting principals from outside the district; and (d) restructuring the job of principal to make it more attractive (e.g., assignment of some job duties to other personnel). The district serving as the site for this research did, in fact, use new techniques (e.g., recruitment web-site) to conduct a more aggressive external recruitment effort to fill principal vacancies. The district recruited 22 new principals, with seven of the new principals coming from outside the district. This was the largest number of externally recruited principals in the district's history.

Based on the findings of this study, the district has also adopted new internal recruitment methods. The district

formulated the objectives of recruiting exceptional teacher candidates into university principal preparation programs and providing strong instructional leadership preparation taught by exemplary principals. The district plans to use a training cadre of experienced principals to serve as adjunct instructors to work closely with a university professor to design and deliver curriculum and mentoring to aspiring principals during the initial year in their preparation program. Further, the district will partially fund tuition costs of the certification coursework for a number of exemplary candidates.

The study findings also inform the task of identifying those principal certified personnel who are most likely to apply for principal vacancies. Such individuals are more likely to be assistant principals than teachers or holders of other administrative positions. The principal certified personnel who are most attracted to the principalship are younger and more recently certified than personnel who are less attracted to the job of principal. Also, the single most significant predictor of an individual's attraction to the principalship is that individual's self-reported capability to do the job. School districts would be well advised to capture measures of capability to do the job at multiple points in the careers of principal certified personnel (e.g., before principal preparation, during principal preparation, after earning

principal certification, after the first year on the job as principal).

The study results are also useful for devising ways to restructure the job of principal as a way to make the job more attractive to potential job applicants. The current and expected job satisfaction ratings indicate that principal certified personnel perceive the job of principal as resulting in sacrifices related to personal and professional factors such as vacation time, time with family, job security, and hours worked. The study participants singled out assignment of some principal job duties to other personnel as the most important change that could be made in the position of principal. Reassigning some duties (e.g., supervision of non-academic extracurricular activities and evening events) to administrative support personnel could have the dual impact of making the job of principal more attractive to potential job applicants and allowing principals, once in the job, to concentrate on the most more important principal responsibilities such as curriculum, instruction, and student learning.

From a research perspective, the private sector recruitment theories that framed this study proved to be useful for identifying vacancy and applicant characteristics as independent variables of interest. Issues that might prove useful for future research include: (a) assessing the impact of monetary and non-

monetary incentives on application rates; (b) examining the viability of non-traditional applicant pools for recruiting principals (e.g., business executives, public sector managers); (c) and determining the impact of job restructuring strategies on applicant attraction to the job of principal.

In conclusion, implementing steps to reform schools and improve student achievement requires the leadership of excellent principals. Enhancing principal recruitment is an urgent task given the declining numbers of individuals willing to pursue the job and the increasing responsibilities school reform programs place on principals. It is hoped that the methods and findings of this study will aid practitioners and researchers alike in improving principal through such means as (a) assessing school districts' internal pools of principal certified personnel and (b) considering strategies for restructuring the principalship to make it a more attractive position in the eyes of individuals who are principal certified and qualified to apply for the job.

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Table 1

Descriptive Data for the Study Participants

Variable	n	%	Mean	SD	Range
Age			49.7	6.8	28-68
Dep. Children			1.1	1.1	0-5
Capability To Do The Job			4.3	.9	1-5
Gender					
Female	118	61.1			
Male	76	38.9			
Ethnicity					
African American	36	18.6			
White American	153	78.9			
Native American	1	.5			
Asian American	1	.5			
Hispanic American	1	.5			
Other	2	1.0			
Marital Status					
Married	140	72.2			
Single	54	27.8			

Table 1 continues on next page

Table 1 Continued

Descriptive Data for the Study Participants

Variable	n	%	Mean	SD	Range
Current Job Held					
Teacher	55	28.4	(n = 32 female, n = 23 male)		
School Counselor	15	7.7	(n = 10 female, n = 5 male)		
Assistant Prin.	73	37.6	(n = 38 female, n = 35 male)		
Other	51	26.3	(n = 38 female, n = 13 male)		
Highest Degree Held					
Bachelors	20	10.3			
Masters	99	51.0			
Specialist	69	35.6			
Doctorate	6	3.1			

N = 194

Table 2

T-test Results for Principal Job Ratings by Participant Gender

	n	Mean	SD	t-value
Gender				
Female	118	7.3	3.1	-.2 *
Male	75	7.2	3.0	

N = 193 (1 participant did not report gender)

* p > .05

T-test Results for Principal Job Ratings by Ethnicity

	n	Mean	SD	t-value
Ethnicity				
Minority	40	7.2	3.1	.9 *
White	153	7.3	3.0	

N = 193 (1 participant did not report ethnicity)

* p > .05

Table 3

T-test Results for Capability Ratings by Gender

	n	Mean	SD	t-value
Gender				
Female	115	4.3	1.0	.8 *
Male	73	4.4	.8	

N = 188 (6 participants did not report gender)

* p > .05

T-test Results for Capability Ratings by Ethnicity

	n	Mean	SD	t-value
Ethnicity				
Minority	40	4.4	.8	-.7 *
White	148	4.3	1.0	

N = 188 (6 participants did not report ethnicity)

* p > .05

Table 4

Analysis of Variance for Principal Job Rating by Current Job Held

Source	df	SS	MS	F
Current Job	3	113.8	37.9	4.3 *
Error	188	1,676.7	8.9	
Total	191	1,790.5		

N = 192 (2 participants failed to complete the job rating items)

* $p < .006$

Table 5

Stepwise Multiple Regression of Participant Job Rating on Predictor Variables

Predictor Variable	β	t value	Increment in R^2
Age	-.214	-2.68 *	.043
Capability	.507	6.35 **	.309

R^2 = .352
Adjusted-R^2 = .340
* p < .01. ** p < .0001